

Minutes of Meeting of the VisitScotland Board held on 04 December 2025 at The Royal Yacht Britannia, and via video conference (MS Teams)

Present: Stephen Leckie (Chair)
Lindsey Paterson
Steven Walker
Cara Aitchison
Shona Marsh (MS Teams)
Paul Easto
Keith Nicholson (MS Teams)

In attendance: Vicki Miller (Chief Executive Officer)
Rob Dickson (Director of Industry and Events)
Ken Neilson (Director of Corporate Services)
Cat Leaver (Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence)
Jill Walker (Director of Marketing and Digital)
Mike Slack (Chief Technology Officer)
Lynn Jack (Chief People and Culture Officer)
Emma Hallington (Senior Advisor to CEO)
Anne-Marie Greer (Head of Financial Services)
Carolyn Churchill (Head of Corporate Affairs) (MS Teams) – *attended for the Corporate Reputation item*
Laura Kirk (Business Manager)

Observers: Gary Cox, Deputy Director for Business Strategy and Tourism (Scottish Government)

Apologies: Barbara Smith

Minutes: Laura Kirk (Business Manager)

INTRODUCTIONS

1. The Chair welcomed the attendees to the hybrid meeting. Gary Cox was welcomed from Scottish Government in an observer capacity. Apologies were received from Barbara Smith and it was noted that Keith Nicholson would join meeting online at 11am.

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 20 October 2025

2. The minutes of the Board meeting held on 20 October 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

3. No conflicts of interest were raised for this meeting.
4. No matters arising were raised for this meeting.

ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR APPROVAL

5. Director of Corporate Services provided an overview of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for Board approval, noting improvements in content and formatting, enhancing visibility of VisitScotland activities and alignment with strategic objectives
6. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) noted that the Annual Report and Financial Statements were the culmination of a full year of work and noted the high level of scrutiny and review that the ARC had undertaken to ensure that the Board could be in a position to approve. It was also highlighted the extensive work and commitment demonstrated by VisitScotland teams. The Chair of ARC confirmed that they would like to recommend approval of the Annual Report and Financial Statements to the Board.
7. The Chairman noted a high level of comfort after joining the ARC meeting; auditors praised VisitScotland for a clean audit report. Two minor audit points were raised 1) Management to consider performance measures that can be tracked over time 2) updates to VisitScotland's fixed asset register, both items have been considered and are being addressed.

The Board approved the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

ACTION: Annual Accounts FAQ paper to be circulated to the Board on the 17th; feedback welcomed from the Board

ARC TERMS OF REFERENCE

8. Director of Corporate Services outlined the updated ARC Terms of Reference.
The Director of Corporate Services proposed that the ARC Terms of Reference be reviewed annually, with updates to reflect changes such as the appointment of the Chair or changes to Board members. Additions were suggested to allow for co-opting if required in specific technical areas, language also to be reviewed around the role of the ARC in relation to the Board to ensure accurate reflection of the ARC's governance role.

The Board approved the Terms of Reference, subject to the above amends.

ACTION: Review the language noted above and the addition of co-opting option.

POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

9. The Director of Corporate Services presented the Procurement and Policy Framework for approval following feedback from the Board at the last meeting.
10. Two policies were presented to the Board for consideration:
 - Internal Environmental Sustainability Policy - This policy deals with our internal approach to environmental sustainability. It covers our ambitions, key objectives, reporting, relevant legislative, regulatory and compliance requirements and

what different groups and staff members are asked to undertake to support our environmental sustainability goals.

- Generative AI Policy - The Chief Technology Officer provided updates on the Generative AI Policy. The policy is currently set for review every six months, though the Director of Corporate Services advised that a twelve-month review cycle may be more appropriate. Proposed changes include: Updating processes for engagement with AI and governance. Establishing workflow integration on Halo. Creating an “AI Zone” to encourage staff to understand and engage with AI, while ensuring guardrails are in place to manage safe use. It was noted that the policy should apply across all devices, including personal mobiles, when accessing VisitScotland-related content.

ACTION: Board feedback on the Internal Environmental Sustainability Policy and the Generative AI Policy to be provided via the dedicated email channel prior to January meeting.

The Board approved the Procurement Strategy and Policy Framework

CHAIR REPORT

11. The Chairman provided an overview of recent discussions with the British Tourist Authority Board (BTA), focusing on governance responsibilities and legislation. Conversations with the CEO of VisitBritain and DCMS highlighted plans to encourage greater dispersal of tourism activity across UK regions. The Chairman noted that VisitScotland’s corporate plan puts Scotland in a strong position and suggested that increased knowledge sharing with devolved nations would enhance engagement and potential collaboration.
12. The Chief Executive Officer noted the opportunity of a stronger relationship with DCMS and the potential for future partnerships through events also highlighting existing examples, including VisitScotland’s travel trade team collaborating with VisitBritain to support inbound educational activity in South Korea and China.
13. The Board acknowledged the importance of strengthening relationships with DCMS and devolved nations to improve partnership opportunities.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

14. The Chief Executive Officer highlighted activity in the Director of Marketing’s area, noting strong performance from our partnerships with Online Tour Operators (OTAs) and in-market campaigns.
15. The Chief Executive Officer noted the recent National Thistle Awards with extremely positive feedback on this year’s events from businesses and key stakeholders. A review is scheduled for January will allow teams to reflect and prepare for the 2026 cycle. The Board queried how VisitScotland showcases Thistle Award winners. The Director for Industry and Events confirmed upcoming discussions with the industry panel on next steps, a paper will be brought to the January meeting to update the Board.
16. The Board discussed potential models for the Visitor Levy. Gary Cox noted that any guidance updates would follow from the legislative process. The Chief Executive Officer emphasised VisitScotland’s commitment to simplicity in its approach to the levy.
17. The Chief Executive Officer highlighted the current performance of the Business Support Hub and

how it was facilitating our 1-2-many approach to business support. Examples included multiple workshops delivered by the Business Development Team on internationalisation and digital channels. Positive growth in the agritourism sector was also highlighted, with further details to be shared with the Board.

18. The Director of Strategy and Competitive Intelligence presented an update on the Balance Scorecard, noting the removal of the macro section and increased focus on activities and impact by strategic pillar. The team will continue to refine the document based on feedback.

ACTION: Paper to be brought to the next meeting relating to the Thistles Awards

ACTION: Provide an update at a future Board meeting on the outcomes of the initial strategic and operational objectives of the Business Support Hub after its first year of operation.

FINANCE AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE REPORT

19. The Head of Financial Services presented the Finance and Business Performance Report, confirming that VisitScotland is on target and tracking well, with no concerns to raise to the Board.
20. Year-on-year tracking is ahead, reflecting positively on the business planning work undertaken by teams.
21. The Board requested that previous years' budget figures be included in future reports to provide a benchmark and aid understanding of year on year comparisons and impact on outcomes.
22. The Board noted the positive financial position and agreed the importance of including comparative data in future reporting.

ACTIONS: Include previous year budget figures in future reports to aid understanding of year on year comparisons and impact on outcomes.

ARC MEETING UPDATE

23. The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee (ARC) provided an update to the Board on the recent ARC meeting and the associated papers in the Board pack.
24. The Chair of ARC noted that Annual Cyber Report had provided the Committee with a comprehensive update on the breadth of work being delivered in this area as well as acknowledging the challenges ahead. It was noted that additional expertise in this area is provided through a member of the ARC and this highlighted the importance of having expert support when required, as noted above in the item 8.
25. It was noted that the current internal audit contract was currently open to procurement with a supplier to be appointed in the new year.
26. The Chair of ARC highlighted key areas of focus for the committee in 2026 which are the induction of a new Director of Corporate Services, the closure of the Strategic Change Programme, data and digital and measurement.
27. The Board members who don't sit on the ARC, expressed their thanks at the level of scrutiny and reassurance that the ARC provides the Board with.

BUDGET SCENARIO PLANNING

28. The Head of Financial Services updated the Board on FY-27-30 Budget and medium term financial outlook outlining 3 key potential scenarios and implications of each. These scenarios considered budget awards that allowed for modest growth in our impact on the visitor economy, maintaining our existing position or a GIA decline that would have the impact of reducing our impact on economic growth.
29. The Head of Financial Services outlined the work done to date through the Strategic Change Programme to deliver significant efficiencies for the organisation.
30. The Chairman referenced comments from the Deputy First Minister noting VisitScotland's leadership in delivering on Public Service Reform objectives and the efficiencies that have been made by the organisation.
31. Assumptions across all scenarios were made relating to the potential inflation rises, future pay awards, changes to commercial and other income targets and also VAT.
32. The Chief Executive Officer provided detail on the three scenarios under consideration, highlighting that these potential budget positions were only possible because of the work that had been undertaken for the last 3 years through the Strategic Change Programme. The Board noted the importance of monitoring the transition of the Strategic Change Programme to business as usual, maintaining flexibility for future adjustments.
33. The Board noted work delivered to put organisation in its current financial position and acknowledged the importance of scenario planning to balance reinvestment opportunities with workforce considerations.
34. The Head of Financial Services also updated the Board on the 2024/25 Budget Reforecast 3 noting that funds allocated to Voluntary Redundancy are now available as the current deadline has passed. Management would like to recommend to the Board that these funds be reinstated to the Marketing Budget as a large element of the in-year cuts have been from the core Marketing budget.

Board approved the reinstatement of the marketing budget through reforecast 3

ACTION: Bring an updated budget position to Board following the budget announcement

CORPORATE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

35. The Head of Corporate Affairs joined the meeting to provide a update on corporate reputation management, outlining VisitScotland's work to engage and influence key stakeholders as well as raising the profile of the visitor economy.
36. It was noted that VisitScotland enjoys strong awareness and regard among MSPs, with the recent MSP Survey, provided by PA Advocacy placing the organisation as one of the most highly regarded public sector organisations in Scotland. Similarly VisitScotland also has a very strong standing with local authority Chief Executives.
37. The Board noted the update and the work done to date to profile the Visitor Economy and build positive relationships across Scottish Government and regional stakeholders and the importance of continuing to develop that narrative.

38. The Board acknowledged that the upcoming elections and potential intake of new MSPs would provide a key opportunity to establish VisitScotland role as an economic growth agency and the importance of the Visitor Economy within the overall economy and the role it plays to drive growth.

AOB

39. The Chief Technology Officer highlighted to the Board that VisitScotland were named winners of the FutureScot AI Challenge at the Digital Scotland 2025 Event. In partnership with Storm ID VisitScotland is developing a proof of concept for an AI powered Trip Planner, the Board noted the award and congratulated the team.
40. The Board discussed the programme of Board meetings for 2026 and if there should be a reduction in number of meetings. It was noted that the current number of eight meetings (inclusive of an annual strategy away day) were potentially too frequent not allowing enough time between sessions leading to minimal movement in activities, outcomes and measures.
41. Scottish Government reinforced that similar sized NDPBs to VisitScotland operated successfully with fewer meetings and expressed no concerns.
42. The Chair of ARC highlighted the importance of timings and alignment between Board and ARC meetings as important to support flow of Governance requirements.
43. The Board agreed that management should review the meeting programme for 2026 and consider reducing the number of meetings with flexibility built in to allow for additional meetings to be added as required.

ACTION: Review the options for board meeting schedule for 2026

CLOSE

Thereafter, the meeting was brought to a close.